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TO THE MEDICAL FRIENDS OF
THE COMPILER.

MEDICAL THOUGHTS OF SHAKESPEARE.

Shakespeare's education was not, by any means, hedged in by plots and characters; besides these, his mighty mind seems to have teemed with the knowledge of languages, medicine, law and court etiquette. It is wonderful that one brain could shine forth such a vast variety, and surprising that he has even gone into the *minutiæ* of the different avenues of learning through which he has stridden. Shakespeare paid considerable attention to medicine, as his remarks on the subject show, but evidently had not a very high idea of the physician; he uses him frequently as a tool by which deaths are produced, through the means of poison, and generally treats him with contempt.

Timon to Banditti:

> Trust not the physician;
> His antidotes are poison, and he slays
> More than you rob.
>
> *Timon of Athens, Act IV., Sc. III.*

Again, in relation to Dr. Pinch, in "Comedy of Errors:"

> They brought one Pinch, a hungry, lean-fac'd villain,
> A mere anatomy, a mountebank,
> A thread-bare juggler, and a fortune teller;
> A needy, hollow-ey'd, sharp-looking wretch,
> A living dead man: this pernicious slave,
> Forsooth, took on him as a conjurer,
> And, gazing in mine eyes, feeling my pulse,
> And with no face, as 'twere, out-facing me,
> Cries out I was possessed.
>
> *Act V., Sc. I.*

The patient dies while the physician sleeps.

Lucrece.

The physician
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Hath left me.

Sonnets, CXLVII.

Testy sick men, when their deaths be near,
No news but health from their physicians know.

Sonnets, CXL.

Cor. The queen is dead.
Cym. Whom worse than a physician
Would this report become. But I consider,
By med'cine life may be prolong'd, yet death
Will seize the doctor too.

Cymbeline. Act V., Sc. V.

King Macb. How does your patient, doctor?
Doct. Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies,
That keep her from her rest.
King Macb. Cure her of that:
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?
Doct. Therein the patient
Must minister to himself.
King Macb. Throw physic to the dogs,
I'll none of it.

Macbeth, Act V., Sc. IV.

He is the wiser man, master doctor: he is a curer of souls, and you a curer of bodies.

Merry Wives, Act II., Sc. III.

A side thrust at the experimenters in the profession is found in Cymbeline.

I do know her spirit,
And will not trust one of her malice with

A drug of such damn'd nature. Those she has
Will stupify and dull the sense awhile;
Which first, perchance, she'll prove on cats and dogs,
Then afterwards up higher.

Act I., Sc. V.

Shakespeare's diseases are many and the symptoms very well defined: how concisely he describes epilepsy, giving us the most prominent symptoms.

Casca. He fell down in the market-place, and foamed at mouth, and was speechless.
Bru. 'Tis very like,—he has the falling sickness.
Casca. * * * * * When he came to himself again, he said, If he had done or said anything amiss, he desired their worships to think it was his infirmity.

Julius Cæsar, Act I., Sc. II.

Julius Cæsar was the only epileptic among his characters: Othello is spoken of as being one, but this is merely Iago's lie to Cassio, which is clearly shown in Othello's conversation after the trance; it being a continuation of the former subject, which is never the case in epilepsy.

Iago. My lord is fall'n into an epilepsy:
This is his second fit; he had one yesterday.
Cas. Rub him about the temples.
Iago. No, forbear:
The lethargy must have his quiet course;
If not, he foams at mouth, and by and by
Breaks out to savage madness.

Act IV., Sc. I.

Timon of Athens makes his curses upon man still more lasting, by calling on those most dreaded of all diseases, consumption and leprosy. Shakespeare here shows a very fine point by using diseases that are hereditary, incurable and contagious—they are certainly lasting, as he wishes the curse to be. Leprosy is expressed in the sentence, "hoar the flamen," or in other

words, make white the priest, the word hoar referring to the white spots so characteristic of the disease.

> Consumptions sow
> In hollow bones of men; strike their sharp shins,
> And mar men's spurring. Crack the lawyer's voice,
> That he may never more false title plead,
> Nor sound his quillets shrilly: hoar the flamen,
> That scolds against the quality of flesh,
> And not believes himself: down with the nose,
> Down with it flat; take the bridge quite away
> Of him that, his particular to foresee,
> Smells from the general weal: make curl'd-pate ruffians bald;
> And let the unscarr'd braggarts of the war
> Derive some pain from you.
>
> *Act IV., Sc. III.*

Some attention has been paid to chlorosis:

> Out, you green-sickness carrion! Out, you baggage,
> You tallow-face!
>
> *Romeo and Juliet, Act III., Sc. V.*

> *Pand.* The pox upon her green sickness for me.
> *Bawd.* Faith, there's no way to be rid on 't, but by the way to the pox.
>
> *Pericles, Act IV., Sc. VI.*

There's never any of these demure boys come to any proof; for thin drink doth so overcool their blood, and making many fish-meals, that they fall into a kind of male green sickness; they are generally fools and cowards.

Henry IV., 2d—Act IV., Sc. III.

> Lepidus,
> Since Pompey's feast, as Menas says, is troubled
> With the green sickness.
>
> *Antony and Cleopatra, Act III., Sc. II.*

What a catalogue have we here—

Now the rotten diseases of the south, the guts-griping, ruptures, catarrhs, loads o' gravel i' the back, lethargies, cold palsies, raw eyes, dirt-rotten livers, wheezing lungs, bladders full of imposthume, sciaticas, lime-kilns i' the palm, incurable bone-ache, and the rivelled fee-simple of tetter, take and take again such preposterous discoveries!

Troilus and Cressida, Act V., Sc. I.

He had a fever when he was in Spain,
And, when the fit was on him, I did mark
How he did shake; 'tis true, this god did shake:
His coward lips did from their colour fly;
And that same eye whose bend did awe the world
Did lose his lustre: I did hear him groan:
Ay, and that tongue of his, that bade the Romans
Mark him, and write his speeches in their books,
Alas! it cried, *Give me some drink, Titinius,*
As a sick girl.

Julius Cæsar, Act I., Sc. II.

Falstaff. And I hear moreover, his highness is fallen into this same whoreson apoplexy.

Ch. Just. Well, heaven mend him! I pray let me speak with you.

Falstaff. This apoplexy is, as I take it, a kind of lethargy, an 't to please your lordship; a kind of sleeping in the blood, a whoreson tingling.

Ch. Just. What tell you me of it? Be it as it is.

Falstaff. It hath its original from much grief; from study and perturbation of the brain.

Henry IV., 2d—Act I., Sc. II.

A few diseases he merely makes mention of—

Which of your hips has the most profound sciatica?

Measure for Measure, Act I., Sc. II.

What grief hath set the jaundice on your cheeks?

Troilus and Cressida, Act I., Sc. III.

This raw rheumatic day.

Merry Wives, Act III., Sc. II.

Danger, like an ague, subtly taints
Even then when we sit idly in the sun.

Troilus and Cressida, Act III., Sc. III.

Men. The service of the foot
Being once gangren'd, is not then respected
For what before it was.

Bru. Pursue him to his house, and pluck him thence,
Let his infection, being of catching nature,
Spread further.

Coriolanus. Act III., Sc. I.

Sic. He's a disease that must be cut away.
Men. O he's a limb that has but a disease;
Moral, to cut it off; to cure it easy.
Coriolanus, Act III., Sc. I.

A little attention is paid to diseases of the eye, thus in Winter's Tale—

Wishing all eyes
Blind with the pin and web, but theirs, theirs only,
That would unseen be wicked.
Act I., Sc. II.

Commentators have the thought that Shakespeare wished to express the idea of cataract by the term pin and web—this is without doubt, a mistake; he did not intend to make lovers so cruel that they should desire to deprive every one else of sight. Pin and web (being a varicose excrescence of the conjunctiva, sometimes to such an extent as to totally prevent vision) was meant to express a veil, or in other words, the eyelid.

He remembers digestion in several of his plays:

My cheese, my digestion.
Troilus and Cressida, Act II., Sc. III.

Things sweet to taste prove in digestion sour.
King Richard II.

True it is, quoth the belly,
That I receive the general food at first,
Which you do live upon; and fit it is,
Because I am the store house and the shop
Of the whole body: but if you do remember,
I send it through the rivers of your blood,
Even to the court, the heart—to the seat o' the brain;
And, through the cranks and offices of man,
The strongest nerves and small inferior veins,
From me receive that natural competency
Whereby they live.
Coriolanus, Act I., Sc. I.

We sicken to shun sickness when we purge.
Sonnets, CXVIII.

Venereal diseases are alluded to in not a few instances:

Lysimachus to keeper of a bawdy house:
Have you that a man may deal withal and defy the surgeon?
Pericles, Act IV., Sc. VI.

Carry his water to the wise man.
Twelfth Night, Act III., Sc. IV.

Falstaff. What says the doctor to my water?
Page. He said, sir, the water itself was a good healthy water; but, for the party that owed it, he might have more diseases than he knew for.
Henry IV., 2d—Act I., Sc. II.

Others, when the bagpipe sings i' the nose, cannot contain their urine.
Merchant of Venice.

When he makes water, his urine is congealed ice.
Measure for Measure, Act III., Sc. II.

Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?
Measure for Measure. Act II., Sc. I.

Syphilis is more frequently referred to than any other disease, and he represents many of his characters as having it; among them Cardinal Wolsey, Falstaff, and Dame Quickly.

A man can no more seperate age and covetousness, than he can part young limbs and lechery; but the gout galls the one, and the pox pinches the other.
Henry IV., 2d—Act I., Sc. II.

Season the slaves
For tubs and baths; bring down rose-cheeked youth
To the tub-fast, and the diet.
Timon of Athens, Act IV., Sc. III.

Dr. Macdonnell, of Canada, has thrown much light on this quotation in his works on Syphilis, he says: "It appears to have been the custom to prescribe for syphilitic patients, in addition to inunction, a prolonged diaphoresis and a very low diet. On the continent the patient was placed in a cave, oven or dungeon, and Wiseman says it was the custom in England to use a tub for this purpose."

In the foot-note to the passage in Johnson & Steven's edition of Shakespeare's works the following quotations from old plays are given:

"———you had better match a ruin'd bawd,
One ten times cur'd by sweating and the tub."
Jaspar Maines, 1639.

Again, in the *Family of Love* (1608), a doctor says:

"O for one of the hoops of my Cornelius' tub, I shall burst myself with laughing else."

In *Monsieur d'Olive* (1606):

"Our embassage is into France, there may be employment for thee: Hast thou a tub."

I'faith, if he be not rotten before he die (as we have many pocky corses now-a-days, that will scarce hold the laying in), he will last you some eight year or nine year.
Hamlet, Act V., Sc. I.

He has not, by any means, forgotten the less important ills "that flesh is heir to," but on the contrary makes frequent mention of them.

He that sleeps feels not the tooth-ache.
Cymbeline, Act V., Sc. IV.

Being troubled with a raging tooth,
I could not sleep.
Othello, Act III., Sc. III.

There was never yet philosopher,
That could endure the tooth-ache patiently.
Much Ado, Act III., Sc II.

She shall be buried with her face upwards;
Yet this is no charm for the tooth-ache.
Much Ado, Act III., Sc. II.

To-night thou shalt have cramps,
Side stitches that shall pen thy breath up.
Tempest, Act I., Sc. II.

Fal. Why, sirs, I am almost out at heels.
Pist. Why, then, let kibes ensue.
Merry Wives, Act I., Sc. III.

Thou art a boil,
A plague-sore, an embossed carbuncle,
In my corrupted blood.
King Lear, Act II., Sc. IV.

Rubbing the poor itch,
* * * * * Make yourselves scabs.
Coriolanus, Act I., Sc. I.

I would thou didst itch from head to foot, and I had the scratching of thee; I would make thee the loathsomest scab in Greece.
Troilus and Cressida, Act II., Sc. I.

Obstetrics was Shakespeare's favorite branch of the profession, and he has not been at all sparing in reference to it.

The queen's in labour. * * * Her sufferance made
Almost each pang a death.
Henry VIII., Act V., Sc. I.

She grew round-wombed, and had a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed.
King Lear, Act I., Sc. I.

The queen rounds apace. * * * *
* * * * * She is spread of late
Into a goodly bulk.
Winter's Tale, Act II., Sc. I.

Shakespeare shows his knowledge of the fact that the penis is merely the spout or funnel by which the semen is conveyed to the uterus, and aptly compares the womb to a bottle, which in his time gradually tapered toward the neck. The word tun-dish is an old Warwickshire name for a funnel.

Duke. Why should he die, sir?
Lucio. Why? For filling a bottle with a tun-dish.
Measure for Measure, Act III., Sc. II.

Hymen hath brought the bride to bed,
Where, by the loss of maidenhead,
A babe is moulded.

Pericles, Gow to Act III.

Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,
That make ungrateful man.

King Lear, Act III, Sc. II.

The child was prisoner to the womb, and is,
By law and process of great Nature, thence
Freed and enfranchis'd.

Winter's Tale, Act II., Sc. II.

The midwives say, the children are not in the fault; whereupon the world increases and kindreds are mightily strengthened.

Henry IV., 2d—Act II., Sc. II.

History records the fact that the Duke of Gloucester, afterwards Richard III., was born with teeth, uneven shoulders, one leg shorter than the other, deformed back, with a clump of hair on it: these facts Shakespeare never forgot, and continually harps on them.

Thy mother felt more than a mother's pain,
And yet brought forth less than a mother's hope;
To wit, an indigest deformed lump,
Not like the fruit of such a goodly tree.
Teeth hadst thou in thy head when thou wast born,
To signify, thou cam'st to bite the world.

Henry VI., Act V., Sc. VI.

I have often heard my mother say
I came into the world with my legs forward:
Had I not reason, think ye, to make haste,
And seek their ruin that usurp'd our right?
The midwife wonder'd and the women cried,
O, Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!
And so I was, which plainly signified
That I should snarl, and bite, and play the dog.

Henry VI., Act V., Sc. VI.

Art thou so hasty? I have stay'd for thee,
God knows, in anguish, pain and agony.
* * * A grievous burden was thy birth to me.

Richard III., Act IV., Sc. IV.

From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept
A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death:
That dog, that had his teeth before his eyes.
Richard III., Act IV., Sc. IV.

That bottled spider, that foul, bunch-back'd toad.
Richard III., Act IV., Sc. IV.

I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable,
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;
Why I, * * * * since I cannot prove a lover,
I am determined to prove a villain.
Richard III., Act I., Sc. I.

Marry, they say my uncle grew so fast
That he could gnaw a crust at two hours old;
'Twas full two years ere I could get a tooth.
Richard III., Act II., Sc. IV.

If ever he have child, abortive be it,
Prodigious, and untimely brought to light,
Whose ugly and unnatural aspect
May fright the hopeful mother at the view.
Richard III., Act I., Sc. II.

Q. Eliz. But thou didst kill my children.
K. Rich. But in your daughter's womb I'll bury them;
Where, in that nest of spicery, they shall breed
Selves of themselves, to your recomforture.
Richard III., Act IV., Sc. IV.

My princely father then had wars in France;
And, by true computation of the time,
Found that the issue was not his begot.
Richard III., Act III., Sc. V.

The longings or desires of pregnant women are very nicely shown in "Measure for Measure:"

She came in great with child, and longing for stewed prunes.
Act II., Sc I.

At sea, in child-bed died she, but brought forth
A maid-child called Marina.

Pericles, Act V., Sc. III.

O pray God, the fruit of her womb miscarry.

Henry IV., 2d—Act V., Sc. IV.

Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.

Macbeth, Act V., Sc. VIII.

Some griefs are med'cinable; that is, one of them,
For it doth physic love.

Cymbeline, Act III., Sc. II.

The blemish that will never be forgot;
Worse than a slavish wipe, or birth hour's blot.

Lucrece.

How nicely does he describe the decay of man, the second childhood, the wasting away of the organism:

The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice
Turning again towards childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness, and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

As You Like It, Act II., Sc. VII.

Again:

Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth, that are written down old with all the characters of age? Have you not a moist eye? a dry hand? a yellow cheek? a white beard? a decreasing leg? an increasing belly? Is not your voice broken? your wind short? your chin double? your wit single? and every part of you blasted with antiquity; and will you yet call yourself young?

Henry IV., 2d—Act I., Sc. II.

The mention of drugs is not scanty, although as he uses drugs only to produce death, he generally classes them under the name of poison: thus in "Romeo and Juliet:"

> Let me have
> A dram of poison; such soon-speeding gear
> As will disperse itself through all the veins,
> That the life-weary taker may fall dead;
> And that the trunk may be discharg'd of breath
> As violently, as hasty powder fir'd
> Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's womb.
>
> *Act V., Sc. I.*

In many other places he mentions the particular drug he wishes to use:

> Set ratsbane by his porridge.
>
> *King Lear, Act III., Sc. IV.*

I had as lief they would put ratsbane in my mouth, as offer to stop it with *security*.

Henry IV. 2d—Act I., Sc. II.

> What rhubarb, senna, or what purgative drug,
> Would scour these English hence?
>
> *Macbeth, Act V., Sc. IV.*

> Thy uncle stole,
> With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
> And in the porches of mine ears did pour
> The leperous distilment; whose effect
> Holds such an enmity with blood of man,
> That, swift as quicksilver, it courses through
> The natural gates and alleys of the body;
> And with a sudden rigour, it doth posset
> And curd, like sour droppings into milk,
> The thin and wholesome blood: so did it mine,
> And a most instant tetter bark'd about.
> Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,
> All my smooth body.
>
> *Hamlet, Act I., Sc. V.*

> Have we eaten on the insane root,
> That takes the reason prisoner?
>
> *Macbeth, Act I., Sc. III.*

Commentators think that Shakespeare found the name of this root in Bateman's Commentary on Bartholeme *de Propriet Rerum:* "Henbane (Hyoscyamus) is called *Insana*, mad, for the use thereof is perillous; for if it be eate or drunke, it breedeth madnesse, or slow lykenesse of sleepe. Therefore this hearb is called commonly Mirilidium, for it taketh away wit and reason."

Lib XVII., Ch. 87.

Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever med'cine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday.

Othello, Act III., Sc. III.

Recovered again with aquavitae, or some other hot infusion.

Winter's Tale, Act IV., Sc. III.

I must needs wake you: * * * *
Alas! my lady's dead! * * * * *
* * * * * Some aquavitae, ho!

Romeo and Juliet, Act IV., Sc. V.

Shakespeare certainly had the true idea of the great value of sleep:

O sleep, gentle sleep,
Nature's soft nurse.

King Henry IV—2d—Act III., Sc. I.

Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course,
Chief nourisher of life's feast.

Macbeth, Act II., Sc. I.

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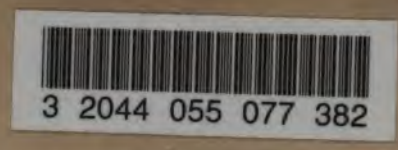

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